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ABSTRACT

Several of the major difficulties that faced urban school systems during the decade from 1965 to 1975 are considered briefly in this short document. One of these problems is the changing nature of the urban population and the resultant stresses on urban districts. Other issues include declining enrollment; insufficient financial support at local, state, and federal levels; inadequate staff utilization and personnel policies; citizen involvement in decision-making; and the accountability movement. Efforts to cope with these issues included installation of management systems like the programming planning budgeting system or management by objectives, introduction of community involvement in decision making (often through advisory councils), decentralization of governance, and provision of programs for improved staff and faculty training. (PGD).

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MANAGEMENT AND GOVERNANCE OF URBAN SCHOOL SYSTEMS

Part I

1. The attached is Part I of a two part paper which has been prepared by Hugh Livingston, Executive Director, The Canyon Institute, U.S.A., for the seminar to be held in the United States from 10th-29th October, 1976. Part II will be distributed in Boston during the first section of the seminar.

2. The document reflects the viewpoints of the author and as such does not necessarily reflect the views of the Organisation or the American authorities.

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MANAGEMENT AND GOVERNANCE OF URBAN SCHOOL SYSTEMS

by Hugh Livingston

The educational systems of the United States, particularly those in the major urban centers, are in a period of substantial crisis. These large urban systems, which enroll more than one-half of the public elementary and secondary school pupils of the nation, are caught in a web of forces and complexities which have led to near paralysis in educational governance, decision-making and virually fiscal bankruptcy. In the following paragraphs, a limited range of the major issues and problems is described, and a brief enumeration of some of the programs/activities instituted by a few major urban districts is presented. No attempt is made to evaluate the effectiveness of these programs in this presentation. Such an analytical evaluation will be presented in a subsequent paper(1).

Changing Character of the Pupil Population

The pupils enrolled in the schools of the major urban centers are increasingly the children of the poor, racial and ethnic minorities, or other disadvantaged groups within the society. These core cities are confronted by problems associated with poverty, crime, inadequate housing, social problems and unemployment. The schools are a microcosm of the city and are confronted daily with all of the problems, dislocation and discontinuities present in the cities they serve. In some ways, the problems of the schools are even more severe as many of the middle and upper middle class residents of the city either have no school-aged children or have enrolled them in private schools.

The impact of these many factors upon the management of urban educational systems is substantial. These urban districts must provide for a disproportionately large number of pupils with special educational and social needs. Specialized counseling and therapeutic services, bi- or multi-lingual institutional programs, health and welfare services are essential pre-conditions to the provision of effective institutional programs, the schools' basic responsibility. Further, disproportionate expenditures are required to provide for the physical welfare of pupils and teachers, and to prevent or repair the results of vandalism to school facilities.

The combined impact of these "urban factors" upon the fiscal capability of urban school systems is substantial. Special instruction and pupil service programs are expensive. The heavy overlay of special needs and requirements taxes the already inadequate financial capability of the large urban school districts. Further attention will be given to the fiscal plight of these large urban school districts in succeeding paragraphs.

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(1) To be delivered in Boston (10th-13th October, 1976).

Managing Education in a Period of Declining Enrollment

The rapid growth in pupil enrollment which characterized the period of the 1950's and 1960's in American education has ended. Most of the larger urban school systems in the nation have experienced a serious decline in pupil enrollment since the late 1960's. For some school systems, the rate of decline has been quite dramatic. The impact of this declining enrollment has been felt in a number of ways.

For those persons charged with the management and governance of education, perhaps the major effect has been psychological. Managing in a declining environment takes different skills and requires new procedures. Most of these individuals were trained to deal with expansion. New plants, additional personnel, new programs occupied the time and energy of those who managed the educational enterprise. In the past, the general public gave its support for new construction and for expanded levels of tax support to provide for the ever increasing pupil enrollment. The growing enrollment seemed to be a visible proof of the need for greater support from the public.

As time passed, expenditures for education expanded more rapidly than the growth in pupil enrollment or the growth of the nation's economy. The onset of the period of stability and then of decline in pupil enrollments marked the end of relative affluence for the nation's school systems. This change of climate, coupled with the changing nature of the pupil population in major urban centers previously discussed, has had a devastating impact on the management of school systems. This impact has been felt most severely in the areas of financial support, staff utilization and evaluation, as well as the provision of necessary programs and services for students. This analysis will now focus upon such matters.

The Growing Crises in Financial Support

For at least two decades, the major urban school systems have faced a continual and not wholly successful struggle to achieve adequate levels of financial support. State legislatures have not been responsive to the growing needs of these major urban systems. Even with the advent of the "one-man-one-vote" decision of the U.S. Supreme Court, the balance of political power in state legislative bodies has remained with the suburban, town, and rural sections of the states. The cities did not enter the current period of declining enrollment and the reversal of the psychology of growth in a position of equity.

Most state school financing programs in the United States are based to some considerable degree on school enrollment. Declining enrollment, therefore, produced declining amounts of state support to school systems. Though most state finance plans provide for periodic adjustments in support formulas to account for inflation, these are rarely sufficient to cover its actual impact. In some of the major urban centers, the decline in enrollment has been sufficiently rapid to more than offset these inflationary adjustments, resulting in less actual dollar support from state sources.

The impact of inadequate support levels, coupled with shrinking resources due to declining enrollment, has been particularly severe in the large urban school systems. This, at a time when the changing nature of the pupil population produces an ever increasing demand for specialized services for pupils, in a brink of virtual bankruptcy. For all such systems in financial strain, reductions of services and programs is an annual requirement. In no state has adequate provision been made for the overload of special urban educational and social needs in state support programs.

The decline in enrollment and the reversal of growth patterns have also effected the attitude of the public. It is generally believed that the schools, now losing enrollment, should be able to "get along" with less. This factor, taken with a loss of confidence concerning the quality of the schools' output (a topic to be discussed later), has led to decreased voter support in large urban systems. Negative results in several successive referenda have been common in a number of cities.

Federal support levels for urban educational systems have not kept pace with the needs. Most federal financial support is distributed in the form of grants for special categorical programs (i.e., handicapped, bi-lingual, poverty level, career and vocational education). These special programs attempt to seriously meet the needs of pupils with specific problems. The level of such support has not been adequate, and guidelines governing use of such resources have often been so restrictive as to limit the effectiveness of the programs.

The growing fiscal crisis in urban education has brought forth numerous highly vocal demands for the increase of sophistication in internal fiscal management. The growing number of specialized categorical programs, the large variety of funding sources with their own individual accounting and reporting requirements, and the increased demand for accountability in the utilization of dwindling resources have had major impact on those who manage urban educational systems. In truth, many urban districts have lacked fiscal management. Many processes found to be successful in other sectors of society have been urged upon urban school systems for application. It is nearly axiomatic that in periods of limited resources, the intensity of public and governmental scrutiny upon processes of budgeting, allocating, and accounting for funds is naturally increased.

Staff Utilization and Accountability

For two decades, large urban school systems were unable to secure sufficiently qualified personnel. The growth of the systems created a never-ending list of vacancies. Those seeking positions in the management structure found numerous opportunities for assignment to those positions. The end of growth and the decline in enrollment have seriously altered the situation. Most large urban districts annually face the prospect of staff reduction. The management structure is subjected to especially intense scrutiny; the cry of "too many administrators at the central office" is common. Because of such pressures, many large urban districts have insufficient personnel in the management structure, and/or are faced with the utilization of personnel where training is not appropriate in the changed circumstances. Opportunities for "promotion" are virtually nil in many systems.

Most states have developed detailed procedures for staff reduction, tenure status and length of service. Effective personnel management in a declining environment requires skills, insights and procedures that have not typically been part of the training of educational administrators.

The changing character of the pupil population has also presented many large urban districts with additional personnel problems. The reduction in staff on a reverse-seniority basis is resulting in an increasing median age of the staff. Few new teachers are hired, and the staff of many districts tends to consist of those recruited decades ago. The age and racial/ethnic make-up of the staff in numerous large urban systems are markedly different from the changed population of the city. (The city serves a pupil population, which is composed of 70% racial and ethnic minorities, while its schools' teaching and administrative staff is 80% Caucasian.) Many urban educators are unprepared to serve the needs of such students either by their own social, economic and racial/ethnic background, or by their limited and outdated professional experience.

Because of statutory restraints, overcoming such obstacles is a long-range process. In a short term, programs for retraining and revitalizing personnel in all categories of service are vital. This new concern has not previously occupied a prime position in the agenda of most school systems.

Politics of Decision-Making

The decades of the 1950's and 1960's were marked by the increase of professionalism in school systems management. Locally elected or appointed governing boards were increasingly appointed or elected through reform efforts designed to remove "politics" from the governance of schoool systems. The management staff of most urban school systems was delegated the major responsibility for school operations. The general public, except in times of crisis or election for tax levies, for capital construction, was largely removed from the decision-making process.

The civil rights movement in the United States marked the turning point in this era. The schools became the focal point of many civil rights issues. Since schools were perceived to be one point of entrance into the national economic and social mainstream, minority groups became intensely interested in local school system management. In time, the intensity of these issues and the changing character of the major urban centers forced the local school governance and management issue into the forefront of community concerns.

Citizens and parents, long absent from the decision-making process of most school systems, took direct and continued interest in school affairs. Meetings of the governing boards in many cities changed from late afternoon sessions devoted to ratification of administrative recommendations to marathon sessions lasting many hours where community concerns, both large and small, were debated. Governing board members in numerous cities which had been appointed from community caucuses were now elected directly by the citizens. The process of election opened the membership of these boards to a greater variety of people.

Community groups, neighborhood associations, teacher and administrative unions, and many other groups began to play an active role in the election process. Board membership took on new dimensions and members became the object of intense political pressures from constituents. Management recommendations were subjected to intense scrutiny, and recommendations that would have been given pro-forma approval in the past, more often than not, became subject to public debate and were often rejected.

The proliferation of community pressure groups and the development of school system employee unions, as major political forces in school governance, created a radically different situation. School management personnel, trained to be "professionals", were unprepared to function in the intensely political atmosphere that characterized most large urban school systems. Many governing boards, lacking background and experience in school management and subjected to intense political pressures, became operationally paralyzed. It is abundantly clear that thoughtful consideration of crucial educational issues and constructive long-range planning for the future have been sporadic, if not altogether missing in many large urban school systems.

Concern Over the Quality of the Educational Product

At the same time that parents and the general public reasserted their "right" to be involved in the decision-making process, there was evidence of a growing concern over the quality of education received by pupils. While this concern was not limited to large urban centers, the changing character of the pupil population of the cities along with the belief that the schools offered the best avenue for entering the mainstream of American society made this issue crucially important in American cities.

Parents and others sought means through which the quality of their schools' instructional effort could be measured. Reasonably simple yet meaningful "yardsticks" of school system performance were demanded by parents, citizens and governing boards. For many years it had been assured that in as complex an enterprise as educating children, direct measures were impossible. Since high levels of student achievement were generally found in those school districts with higher per-pupil expenditure, it was concluded that high expenditure correlated ever-increasing school costs and, declining enrollment simultaneously with lower levels of pupil achievement. State and national testing programs showed annual declines in basic skill areas such as reading, language skills, arithmetic, and national college entrance scores dropped steadily for pupils in all parts of the nation. The confidence of the general public and of many parents in their schools was severely skaken. This loss of confidence, as indicated earlier, contributed substantially to the repeated failure of elections to increase local school tax, and legislative support.

The professional staffs of most school systems have been subjected to intense criticisms. Demands for increased individual professional accountability, for the abolishment of teacher tenure, for major revision of the teacher certification laws, and for extensive reform of personnel

evaluation systems have been widespread. Parents in many systems demand a role in the selection and evaluation of teachers and administrators. The general public and particularly parents are determined that the quality of the educational experience available to children and youth should be improved.

Summary

This analysis of a number of forces which have impaired the leadership and management of U.S. urban educational systems could leave the reader with feelings of distress and dismay. The situation is not as bleak as it might appear at first. There are many examples of exemplary efforts in dealing with the complex issues and forces impairing urban education in the United States. In the paragraphs which follow, a brief summary of a few of these efforts is made. A succeeding paper will present a detailed analysis of a number of relatively successful programs.

The growing fiscal crisis in urban education and the increased intensity of public examination of local affairs have made the reform of internal fiscal management mandatory. During the 1960's, the federal government and many business organizations in the private sector instituted what was known as the Program Planning Budgeting System (PPBS). This system, which provided for the allocation and accounting of funds by specific programs, was seen as the means of bringing greater efficiency to school management. Now it would be possible to assess the actual direct and indirect costs associated with school programs, and to make judgments about the relative success of alternative approaches to desired goals. PPBS had many advocates throughout the nation and some state legislative bodies made such systems mandatory for all school districts.

Management by Objectives (MBO) was another program urged upon school systems during this period. It was believed by advocates that the development of specific objectives for each program and each school in a system would add measurably to the quality of "output". Some individual states mandated every school system to initiate a process whereby citizens, parents, staff, and pupils consider alternative goals and establish the objectives for annual programs. It was also believed that the process of goal-setting involving diverse groups of people would lead to: 1) increase communication within the schools, 2) greater sensitivity on the parts of varied groups to a varied range of hopes and aspirations, and 3) an exposure of what needs the people hold for their schools.

School management by specific objectives was seen as a crucial means to make most efficient use of dwindling resources. By determining objectives in priority order, planning and implementation would be enhanced, and evaluation of outcomes would be based upon the priority objectives of the system.

The need to improve communication within school systems and to open up the decision-making process to parents and community groups has led to a number of reforms, particularly in the larger urban centers. A regional governance structure has received a good deal of

attention. A common response to such a plan has been the creation of regions or sub-districts within the larger systems. These new regional structures have been delegated varying levels of authority and responsibility of the systems. The initiative for the creation of these new units has originated from state legislatures or from local groups within or outside of the system. There is no uniformity in this regional governance, and there are as many plans as there are locations.

Numerous other programs have been initiated to bring parents and citizens into the decision-making process. Individual school and district-wide advisory councils have been initiated by many systems. These groups have been given a variety of responsibilities and have been unequal in the degree of their effectiveness. Where regional or decentraled governance has been instituted, it has in some cases been delegated major responsibilities. Some groups are ad hoc, while others are chartered on a continuous basis by the governing board.

Many federally financed programs have mandated that advisory groups be created and that a majority of their members be representative of the target population (i.e., handicapped, poverty level, etc.). These groups, under the federal program guidelines, are expected to play a major role in setting the direction of such programs and to evaluate their effectiveness. The variety of the programs requiring such groups in school systems as diverse as in the United States makes generalities concerning their effectiveness quite difficult. They do have the objective of a participant decision-making process in common.

The concern for accountability and for improved staff performance has led to a variety of programs for staff evaluation and training. Again, it is difficult to generalize such programs. Staff accountability and evaluation have ranged from uniform state-wide attempts to individual school system attempts.

Where a degree of regional or decentralized governance exists, personnel selection and evaluation has at times been delegated to the district or school level. However, the complexity of personnel evaluation, coupled with extensive legislative prescription regarding personnel policies in some states, has limited progress in this critical area.

The serious need for retraining and revitalizing professional staff members has not received attention with the required gravity of the issue. Some local school systems make limited provisions for such efforts. Many districts also include additional compensation for continued professional training as a salary incentive. Few system-wide, carefully planned, professional development and training programs exist, particularly in larger urban systems. The fiscal crisis facing most school systems seems to preclude adequate budgetary provision for this central need.

Conclusion

Managing urban education in the United States is a complex and difficult matter. Conditions in the large urban centers have changed markedly in the last decade. Declining enrollment and fiscal depletion have led to a seemingly endless reduction of programs and services at a time when many urban parents expect more of the schools than ever before. Governing boards and systems management personnel have sought and continue to seek new means for dealing with these changed conditions. A few of the more prominent programs have been briefly mentioned in the preceding paragraphs. A subsequent paper will examine these and other programs in more detail and will assess the merit of these programs in improving urban educational management in the United States.